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**HAVE WE THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST?**





## HAVE WE THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST?

### THE TESTIMONY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ART

FRANKLIN JOHNSON

THE question, Have we the likeness of Christ? is usually answered in the negative by scholars who study it carefully. The evidences to which they appeal are chiefly literary, the statements of the church fathers concerning art in general and the representations of Christ in particular; and they seldom give prolonged attention to the testimony of art itself. An example of this disproportionate emphasis of the literary evidence may be seen in *The Life of Christ in Art*, by Farrar. Here the question which I have asked is discussed at length. One would expect to find the argument from art in a book devoted to the life of Christ in art; but the early chapters, in which the question is considered, deal almost exclusively with the literary evidence. Another example of the same kind may be seen in the *Storia dell' Arte Cristiana*, by Garrucci, a monumental work in six folio volumes. Here the author, though writing an exhaustive history of Christian art during the first eight hundred years, answers our question by an appeal to Augustine, who says that in his time no one knew what the personal appearance of Christ was.

Now, it is obvious that literature furnishes but a part of the evidence which should be weighed, and that art itself should be consulted. We can readily imagine circumstances in which art would completely reverse a conclusion derived from literature. Let us suppose that we had no description of Charlemagne by the writers of his time or of the time immediately succeeding. Still, we need not at once despair of learning something of his personal appearance. Art gives us many representations of him. These, though they come from many different hands and many different periods, agree in several important particulars. How shall we account for the agreements? Are they proof of a tradition in art which may be traced through the pictures of successive centuries to the circle of his personal acquaintances? It is conceivable that we might push back our search through a long line of portraits till we should discover some of his own age. In that case we should have his likeness, and should be sure of it, despite the discouraging testimony of literature. So we might identify the likeness of Christ by a similar process, and be entirely certain of the result, without reference to the statements of early Christian writers.

On this new path of research several students of our question have entered in recent years, and have brought back an affirmative answer. It is my purpose to consider the work of one of these students. I choose this one both because he is the most recent of the class, and because he has made good use of the work done by his predecessors. The argument which I shall consider is presented to us in a fascinating

book entitled *Rex Regum*. It is from the pen of Sir Wyke Bayliss, a distinguished painter, and president of the Royal Society of British Artists. It represents, therefore, the views of an expert in painting, though not in archæology.

It has an interesting history. Sir Wyke Bayliss was an intimate friend of Mr. Thomas Heaphy, who for years had made a special study of the representations of the Savior in early Christian art, and had prepared a book concerning them. But death overtook Mr. Heaphy before he was able to publish his book. His manuscript, however, was left to Sir Wyke Bayliss, who brought it out under the title of *The Likeness of Christ*. Sir Wyke was already deeply interested in the subject; he continued to study it; and at length gave to the world his own contribution to the discussion in the volume on which I am now to comment, and put into it all the evidences which he considered worthy. He has not merely restated the argument of Mr. Heaphy, but has searched and sifted for himself. His book may be accepted, therefore, as containing all that can be said in favor of the supposition that we have a valid likeness of Christ in our art. I shall now consider his argument.

His method is simple. From the representations of Christ in the mosaics of the older churches of Rome he selects five which conform most nearly to his ideal. He carries these five mosaics into the Roman catacombs and selects there six or seven frescoes which, in his judgment, somewhat resemble them, and four gildings on glass which also, in his judgment, somewhat resemble them. The evidences which he assembles in this manner he seeks to corroborate in a chapter entitled "Division of the Churches," and in another entitled "A Cloud of Witnesses." Finally, he brings the five mosaics down into later times and shows without difficulty that they, or other representations like them, have influenced many of the great artists of Christian history.

The influence of these mosaics on the later pictures of Christ I admit at once; but it has no bearing on the subject before us. The decision must turn on the relation of these mosaics, not to the later, but to the earlier representations. Do they set forth a tradition in art which can be traced back through an unbroken line to the apostolic age? That is the only question with which we are concerned.

Excluding now the later representations, which have nothing to do with the matter, the witnesses summoned by Sir Wyke Bayliss fall into the following groups: first, the five Roman mosaics; secondly, certain frescoes of the Roman catacombs; thirdly, certain fragments of gilded glass from the same catacombs; fourthly, the collateral evidence offered in the chapter entitled "Division of the Churches;" and fifthly, the collateral evidence offered in the chapter entitled "A Cloud of Witnesses."

This brief summary of the evidence brings before us the first difficulty suggested by the argument, which is the narrowness of its induction. In the chapter entitled "Division of the Churches" the author endeavors to gain the support of the eastern church; but, as we shall see, he does not succeed; and his evidence, such as it is, he gathers in Rome alone. But there are other places that have something to say and

that should be questioned. Moreover, the examples cited from Rome are a few selected out of scores not permitted to speak. If I should proceed in this way, I could easily prove that we have the likeness of Mary, of Judas, or of John. Making a discriminating choice, I could show a distinct type for each of these characters. Indeed, art is more uniform in its representations of Judas and John than in its representations of Christ, though no one supposes that it gives us their portraits. Or, to put my case in still another way: if I were permitted to cull out ten or fifteen instances from the mass, I could show that Christ had short hair and a beardless round face; or I could show that he had long hair and a beardless round face; or, again, I could show that he had short hair and a bearded face. In any of these three groups of evidence, moreover, the representations would agree in setting forth a distinct type of features and of expression. But the procedure would be wrong, for the conclusion would be based upon a narrow induction, excluding many of the facts which ought to affect it.

But if the induction of Sir Wyke Bayliss were sufficiently broad, it would not lead to his conclusion, as I shall now show by examining the five groups of witnesses in the order in which I have already brought them before the reader.

I. It is apparent that it will be advantageous for Sir Wyke to give his mosaics and frescoes and glass fragments as early dates as possible. This he does; and first with his five mosaics.

He tells us that one of these is from the sixth century; that two are still later; and that the remaining two, the earliest of the group, are from the fourth century. Since the group is bound together by a strong family resemblance, its total evidence is carried back thus to the fourth century. It is necessary, therefore, to ask if the two mosaics on which this part of the argument depends are really from the fourth century. One of them is in the so-called Baptistry of Constantine, and the other in St. Paul's without the Walls (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The moment we examine the history of these mosaics critically, we find that both must be as late as the fifth century. The so-called Baptistry of Constantine is no longer attributed to Constantine by historians, but to

<sup>1</sup>This illustration and those on pp. 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, and 21 are reproduced from BAYLISS, *Rex Regum*, by the courteous permission of the publishers, Messrs. George



FIG. 1

Sixtus III., who was pope from 422 to 440. It is still attributed to Constantine in such guide-books as that of Murray, and a few uncritical writers still repeat the absurd story of the unexampled magnificence with which that emperor is fabled to have decorated the interior, and especially the font. But all recent careful writers

deny that he had any connection with the building, except possibly as a collector of columns and other choice materials which were afterward used in its construction. The mosaic of St. Paul's without the Walls was executed by the order of Galla Placidia in 440. She lived till 451.

I have no doubt that Sir Wyke is sincere in attributing these two mosaics to the fourth century. He is a painter and not an archaeologist, and should not be expected to tread without slipping on ground that has sometimes betrayed even the archaeologist; yet, as the unintentional error enables him to connect his group of mosaics more easily and more cogently with the material which he finds in the catacombs, it is right for me to show that they are later than he supposes.

Sir Wyke might have produced a mosaic from the latter part of the fourth century if he had desired. I refer to the splendid decora-



FIG. 2

tion in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana, which is usually referred by archaeologists to the period between 384 and 399. But it was wise to choose later examples, for this is of another type, and what is called the traditional Christ cannot be traced to it, though it has the beard and the hair falling upon the shoulders to which we are accustomed. Of the group selected by Sir Wyke, the Christ of SS. Cosmo and Damiano may be

taken as the best example (Fig. 2). Mr. Walter Lowrie<sup>2</sup> is right in regarding this mosaic as marking a change in the delineations of Christ; he says:

This work shows the influence upon art of that new race, the Gothic barbarians of the north, which had already become dominant in political affairs. The faces are of a type never found in classic art; they have a certain almost savage forcefulness, which, together with the colossal size of the figures and the statuesque majesty with which they stand out against the dark blue background, produces an effect which cannot readily be forgotten. . . . The face of Christ presents a type which we have not hitherto seen. . . . The face is longer and older than usual, and has an expression which is severe without being harsh.

The Christ in Sta. Pudenziana is far younger, less self-conscious, and, though not weak, less forceful. It may be said that the Christ who is beyond mid-life, and severe, and conscious of supreme power, and without love or pity, is never found before the fifth century. It may be said also that this representation, by its very majesty and power, made a profound impression on later artists, and haunted their imagination even when they painted Christ suffering in Gethsemane or on the cross. It is destitute of spirituality and emotion; it is secular, a triumphant emperor rather than a triumphant Savior; and many of them sought to remedy these defects while still preserving at least the framework of the mighty delineations which they admired so greatly.

To sum up this criticism of the mosaics selected by Sir Wyke Bayliss as the starting-point of his argument: They are all as late as the fifth century, and hence are not easily connected with the earlier representations found in the catacombs; and, moreover, they exclude a magnificent mosaic of the fourth century which pictures our Savior in a different spirit and with a different effect.

II. Sir Wyke, having found his type in the mosaics of the early basilicas of Rome, searches for it next among the frescoes of the catacombs. As he erroneously pushes some of his mosaics back to the fourth century, causing them thus to overlap the catacomb period, so he pushes some of his frescoes back to the apostolic period by a process of as doubtful validity. He does this, first, by selecting certain frescoes in which he thinks he finds the features already discovered in the mosaics of the fifth century, and by affirming that two of them, at least, must have been painted by men who had seen the Lord and who intended them to represent his personal appearance. The first of the two has become somewhat famous in the criticism of early Christian art. Mr. Heaphy, in his book *The Likeness of Christ*, claims that he himself copied the fresco, and that his reproduction is faithful to the original. Sir Wyke Bayliss adopts the copy of Mr. Heaphy as accurate, and calls the fresco "the most beautiful," "the divinest and most human," of the representations of Christ in the catacombs.

One difficulty with the argument based on this picture is our inability to find out where the original is. Mr. Heaphy, who tells us that he made his copy from the original, tells us also that the original is in the catacomb of St. Callistus. But

<sup>2</sup> *Monuments of the Early Church*, p. 311.

Northcote and Brownlow,<sup>3</sup> very high authorities, tell us that it cannot be found there, but that it is in the catacomb "of Domatilla, in the same chamber in which there is the representation of Orpheus and his lyre." Their statement was published in 1879. But Sir Wyke Bayliss, writing nineteen years later, places the fresco back in the catacomb of St. Callistus.

Another difficulty arises from the state of the fresco when Mr. Heaphy saw it. His book was not yet published in 1879, when Northcote and Brownlow wrote. They were permitted by his publishers to copy the picture from his manuscript in advance,

and they reproduced it in their book before his appeared. They must have studied the original, therefore, soon after Mr. Heaphy copied it, and this is what they say of it: "In our own careful examination of the fresco we entirely failed to gain any clear view of the features; and the Count de St. Laurent, who spared no pains to make his work as perfect as possible, declares that in its present condition it is impossible to distinguish them." It is a question, therefore, whether the picture which Mr.



FIG. 3

Heaphy presents is an exact copy or largely a reconstruction from his ardent fancy and his skilful hands.

The question becomes still more urgent when we compare the copy made by Mr. Heaphy with a copy published by Kugler<sup>4</sup> thirty years earlier, when the fresco should have been in a better condition (Figs. 3 and 4).<sup>5</sup> Northcote and Brownlow place them beside each other. The comparison renders it evident that, if Kugler, the

<sup>3</sup> *Roma sotterranea*, Vol. II, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> *Schools of Painting in Italy*, Part I, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> The above illustration, and those on pp. 9 and 19, are

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earlier copyist, is accurate, Mr. Heaphy is not. The difference is to be observed, not only in a score of minor details, but also in the larger characteristics, about which no copyist can mistake. Kugler gives us a three-quarters face, Mr. Heaphy almost a full face. Kugler gives us a strong, resolute, and somewhat crude man of affairs; Mr. Heaphy, a sweet, sad, patient, and passive saint.

Still further: If Sir Wyke Bayliss, following Mr. Heaphy, has given us an accurate copy, he has cast great doubt upon his argument in doing so, for the type represented by this head of Christ is altogether different from that of the five mosaics. This is mild, sweet, sympathetic, and somewhat irresolute, while that is stern, self-contained, self-satisfied, and mighty in will-power. If this represents the real character of our Lord, that does not. It is true that both types have long hair and a beard; but so have thousands of other pictures representing as many thousands of different individuals.

That the fresco is from a very early period is maintained by Sir Wyke chiefly on the ground of his own artistic feeling that it is an actual portrait. "I believe it," he says, "to have been the work of a Roman artist, a portrait painter, who had himself seen Christ."

In corroboration of his personal impression that it is extremely early, Sir Wyke reminds us that it has no nimbus. But the absence of this symbol proves nothing whatever. The opinions of the best archaeologists on this subject are summarized thus by Northcote and Brownlow:<sup>6</sup>

Garrucci considers that in the fifth century Christian artists either used or omitted it indifferently, but that after that time its use became universal. Martigny, a more recent and cautious authority, distinguishes with greater accuracy when he says that it was used for our blessed Lord occasionally before the days of Constantine, and constantly afterwards.

Thus in works produced before the triumph of the church under Constantine the absence of the nimbus is to be expected. But these writers date the universal employment of the nimbus far too early, for it is absent from the head of Christ on

<sup>6</sup> *Roma sotterranea*, Vol. II, p. 190.



FIG. 4

the Byzantine coins almost as frequently as it is present, even after the establishment of the Latin power in Constantinople. Nay, as it is absent from the head of Christ in "The Last Judgment" of Michael Angelo, it may be said never to have become universal.



FIG. 5

In the catacombs there are several pictures of Christ, portrait-busts, but they can hardly be older than the fifth or sixth century. The best known is the Christ of St. Callistus, as it was once called, but, more properly, of SS. Nereus and Achilleus, or of St. Domatilla.

When I am asked to accept the artistic feeling of Mr. Heaphy and Sir Wyke Bayliss that this fresco is from the apostolic age, rather than the critical judgment of such archaeologists as De Rossi and Kraus that it is not earlier than the third century, and may be as late as the fifth or sixth, I must decline.

The other picture (Fig. 5) on which Sir Wyke chiefly depends is but little like the first. He writes of it with much assurance:

[It] cannot be anything else than a portrait. It is from the catacomb of SS. Achilleus and Nereus, and bears the unmistakable marks of portraiture; not portraiture of the highest class, but of such a kind as a Roman artist could accomplish who had himself seen our Lord, and painted either from memory or from an authentic model.

But, if the first was an actual portrait of Christ, this cannot be, for they differ as widely as the poles. Moreover, this fresco differs as widely from the five mosaics. It has

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 217.

<sup>8</sup> *Christliche Kunst*, p. 101.



FIG. 6

not even the long hair to bring it into some degree of external accordance with the other representations to which Sir Wyke has appealed. It pictures a soul unlike that of the sweet, sad, and irresolute fresco which we have just studied, and equally unlike

that of the cold and mighty mosaics. It sets before us a man of limited attainments and narrow judgment and feeble public influence. Sir Wyke offers us no proof whatever that it is early; we are asked to trust his artistic feeling, and on this ground alone to accept it as designed to represent Christ, and as a portrait by a Roman artist who had seen the living original, and painted "either from memory or from an authentic model."

A third fresco is presented to us by Sir Wyke as follows:

[It] was taken from the catacombs, and is now in the library of the Vatican. It is the central figure in a group of Christ and the apostles; and,



FIG. 7

while the face of our Lord is finished with the utmost care, the faces of the disciples, with the exception of St. Peter and St. John, are extremely slight and characterless. Mr. Heaphy attributes this to the desire on the part of the artist to give special emphasis to the features of the Master; but I believe it to have been because the features of the Master and of the two apostles alone were known to the painter, and that he sketched in the rest, without any authoritative guidance, from his own imagination.

That the picture is late, and was painted near the close of the catacomb period, is evident at a glance from the fact that it has the nimbus inclosing a cross (Fig. 6). Now, this is never found in Christian art before the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>9</sup> I need hardly point out the great gulf which separates this commonplace and characterless head from the two examples just considered, and from the regal and strong mosaics.

The fourth picture (Fig. 7) is even poorer and less substantial; and it condemns

<sup>9</sup> NORTHCOTE AND BROWNLOW, Vol. II, p. 189.



FIG. 8.

itself as a witness so openly and evidently that I shall say but little concerning it. In the circle about the head Sir Wyke sees "distinct references to the Apocalypse," and decides that it "cannot therefore be earlier than the end of the first century." But we have still to ask for proof that it is earlier than the fifth; he gives us none. Its evidential value is so insignificant, however, that its date is of little importance.

The last of these frescoes (Fig. 8) represents a person of still another type. He is aging; the world has bruised and battered him till he has no courage to face it; he was never weighty in character, and now, after much sad experience, as the shadows of evening gather about him, he has no heart for further conflict, but prefers melancholy meditation. This is my reading of the picture.

That it is very early Sir Wyke would prove by the fact that it has no nimbus. I have already shown that this symbol is absent from the head of Christ in the majority of instances before Constantine, and in many instances of a much later time.

But Sir Wyke has still another proof of the very early date. He writes:

The wall upon which it is painted has been cut through, to the destruction of the picture of which it formed a part, in order to find a place of burial near to a martyr's grave. This could scarcely have been done within the living memory of those who caused the picture to be painted; and yet the hands which destroyed the other figures were careful to leave untouched the face of Christ.

Now, how little this argument is worth is apparent when we consider that there were burials in the catacombs near the supposed tombs of the martyrs as late as the beginning of the fifth century, and that it would be natural for any believing persons to spare the face of Christ in seeking a place to lay their dead. The passion for these burials arose after the peace of the church in 311, and prevailed until there was no longer any unoccupied space near the tombs of the martyrs. The fresco must be earlier than 410, when, as De Rossi has shown, all burials in the catacombs ceased; but this is all that we can know concerning its date.

Such are the frescoes from the catacombs of which Sir Wyke affirms two things: first, that they are of the same essential type with the mosaics of the fifth century; and, secondly, that they carry this type back into the apostolic age and prove that it originated with Roman portrait painters who had seen the original. I have shown in my reply that both these claims are destitute of foundation. The frescoes differ as widely from the mosaics as they would if they had been painted from modern men as sitters. They differ among themselves so widely that Sir Wyke, if they were presented to him for examination with no statement concerning their source, would never suppose them designed to represent one and the same person. But his second claim has been found as illusory as the first. The frescoes do not come from the apostolic age or from artists who had seen the Lord; they are relatively late, and at least one of them is as late as the fifth century.

III. The evidence from the gilded glass found in the catacombs is next in order. I shall permit Northcote and Brownlow to describe these objects:

These glasses are, the greater part of them, evidently the bottoms of drinking cups. Their peculiarity consists in a design having been executed in gold-leaf on the flat bottom of the cup in such a manner as that the figures and letters should be seen from the inside, like the designs on the bottoms of the ale tankards so popular at Oxford and Cambridge. The gold-leaf was then protected by a plate of glass, which was welded by fire so as to form one solid mass with the cup. These cups, like the other articles found in the catacombs, were stuck into the still soft cement of the grave; and the double glass bottom, imbedded in the plaster, has resisted the action of time, while the thinner portion of the cup, exposed to accident and decay by standing out from the plaster, has in almost every instance perished.

The fragments were found outside the graves, stuck into the plaster with which they were closed. It is not certain that the entire cup was always appropriated to this use; it may be that in the majority of instances only the bottoms of vessels already broken were employed. It is probable that the purpose was to mark the grave so that the friends of the person buried in it could identify it in the dim light of the galleries and amidst the multitudes of others closely resembling it. As there was a great variety of devices engraved on the glasses, it would not be difficult for each family group to remember its own.

Garrucci gives accurate drawings of all these precious fragments which are preserved in the museums of Europe, and on his pages we are able to inspect the entire treasure of 340 examples.

Of these Sir Wyke Bayliss selects four which he thinks come to us from the apostolic age and bear the same likeness of Christ presented to us by the mosaics of the fifth century. It is evident, therefore, that the two questions which we discussed when we studied the frescoes of the catacombs occur to us again as we turn to these four glass fragments. Are they from the apostolic age? And do they give us essentially the same representations of Christ with that of the mosaics?

As to the first question, Sir Wyke sets himself against the unanimous decision of archaeologists. De Rossi<sup>10</sup> assigns the glass fragments to the period between the middle of the third century and the beginning of the fourth. This dating is reached by an examination of the dress, the mode of arranging the hair, the orthography, and



FIG. 9

<sup>10</sup> NORTHCOTE AND BROWNLOW, Vol. II, p. 301.

other indications. No archaeologist with whose writings I am acquainted carries them back to an earlier time.

Sir Wyke Bayliss brings forward once more the argument from the absence of the nimbus. It is not found about the heads of Peter, Paul, and John, on a fragment (Fig. 9) where they are represented together with Damas, a Christian concerning whom nothing is known. As they are in the list of saints, and he is not, they would have been distinguished from him by the possession of the nimbus if the fragment were not very early. "The point is," he writes, "that these likenesses were executed before the three were differentiated from the fourth as saints, when the aureole was for Christ alone." But this symbol was never given as a means of distinguishing the saints from others before the sixth century. The argument of Sir Wyke, therefore, proves only that the fragment is earlier than the sixth century.

Sir Wyke offers as another reason for an early dating of these four fragments his conviction that the heads of the Christians depicted on them are portraits, and hence must have been executed while the originals which they represent were still alive. He lays special emphasis on the fragment bearing the busts of Peter, Paul, John, and Damas. These heads are so different each from the others, that is, so fully individualized, that they must be portraits. Christ is not represented on this fragment. But on the next one (Fig. 10) we find

the same heads of Peter and Paul, together with Christ, and this, therefore, must have been made in the lifetime of Peter and Paul, when it would be easy to procure a description of Christ, and when, in fact, the artist, who was careful to give us portraits of Peter and Paul, would not have been satisfied to give us anything else than a portrait of the Master whom they served.

But now no archaeologist believes that we have here or anywhere else actual portraits of apostles made while they were living. There is a strong inclination on the part of some archaeologists to accept the early representations of Peter and Paul as reminiscences of their personal appearance, and valid as types, though not as actual portraits.<sup>11</sup> If both were well known to the Christians in Rome, it would be natural that the Roman Christian artists should preserve and transmit some suggestions

<sup>11</sup> Lanciani is a prominent advocate of this opinion.



FIG. 10

of their appearance. Yet the question is one of fact, and not of antecedent probability. I am disposed to answer it in the affirmative. But great difficulties attend the affirmative answer. For example, on these very fragments from the catacombs, while Paul is often bald and Peter has a full head of hair, Peter is sometimes bald, while Paul has a full head of hair. Moreover, the individualizing is never so clear and convincing that one is compelled to see in it the evidence of a careful tradition. Certainly it does not amount to portraiture of living subjects. And if we have no actual portraits of the apostle Paul, who was well known to the Roman Christians, we should not expect to find in Rome a portrait of Christ, who lived and died in an obscure and distant province.

Sir Wyke devotes an entire chapter to a glass fragment which represents the miracle at Cana, and which must have been made, he assures us, before the gospel of John was known by the Roman Christians. The record of the miracle is found only in the gospel of John. Here we are told definitely that there were six waterpots. Had this gospel been known in Rome where the glass was gilded, the artist would have given us six waterpots. But, in fact, he gives us seven. He must, therefore, have followed an oral narrative, one detail of which escaped his memory, and he could have done this only before the written gospel of John was known to the Christians of Rome. Sir Wyke thinks that he was led to picture seven waterpots by the symbolic significance of the number seven; and also "that this particular picture was executed before the actual manuscript of St. John's gospel was received by them; otherwise it is inexplicable that the symbolism of seven should have overridden the sacred text." Thus the representation of Christ on this fragment is pushed back into the apostolic age, and is made a valid likeness.

But, unfortunately for the argument, the early Christian artists, in representing the miracle at Cana, paid little attention either to the number of the waterpots stated in the gospel or to "the symbolism of seven." They are sometimes guided by the space at their command, as on the sarcophagi, and often limit the jars to three. But this consideration does not seem always to determine the number, and we have four and five and seven where it would have been as easy to give us six. Nor are these aberrations an indication of a very early period; they are found in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.

Thus much in reference to the early dating of these glass fragments.

We have still to consider the question whether they bring us for substance the same likeness of Christ which we found when we studied the mosaics of the fifth century. Sir Wyke Bayliss would grant at once that they are so small as to render difficult the task of determining the special type of the features. He would grant also that a small head sketched hastily in gold foil for a cheap cup would not represent the accuracy of a miniature wrought by a skilled artist. But these admissions would go far to invalidate the interpretation of these pictures as likenesses.

I do not pause, however, with these assumed admissions. Sir Wyke has given us

copies of the four fragments on which he chiefly depends, and on them all Christ appears with a beard and long hair. But all the other students of them with whose works I am acquainted make them represent Christ with a smooth face and short hair. I refer to Perret,<sup>12</sup> to Roller,<sup>13</sup> and to Garrucci.<sup>14</sup> These men are professional archæologists, and they have no argument to sustain. I accept their reproductions as accurate.

Sir Wyke writes pathetically of a Christian woman named Eutychia, who possessed one of these glass fragments, and on whose breast it was laid when she was buried. The subject of the picture which it bears (Fig. 11) is Christ restoring the fruit of the tree of life. The copy of it which Sir Wyke publishes shows us Christ with a beard and long hair, and a large nimbus raying out, not only from his head, but from his entire body. All the other students of it, however, show us Christ with a

smooth face and short hair, and no nimbus. I ask the special attention of my readers to this particular fragment, because the emotion with which Sir Wyke writes about it may take them captive. I do not doubt his sincere intention to give us a faithful copy; but neither do I doubt the sincere intention of the archæologists to give us faithful copies; and, since I must choose, I do not hesitate to accept their testimony in preference to his.

But, if we should even grant that he is right in giving a beard and long hair to these small representations of Christ, we could not regard them as exhibiting the same type with the mosaics of the fifth century. A beard and long hair do not determine a type in art, else all the pictures ever painted with a beard and long hair would represent but one type. If a picture is so small

and so crude that careful students of it differ concerning the question whether the face is bearded or smooth, the hair long or short, and the head encircled by a nimbus or not, it cannot tell us anything about the face which will enable us to assign it to a particular type. And that these pictures are, in fact, too small to give us any testimony of value in this discussion is the uniform verdict of the professional archæologists. We may accept Northcote and Brownlow as good representatives of the class when they say: "The gilded glasses found in the catacombs never give any characteristic figure of Christ, such as could be mistaken for a personal portrait."

IV. In the chapter entitled "Division of the Churches" Sir Wyke Bayliss endeavors to make his induction as broad as possible by affirming that the Latin

<sup>12</sup> *Catacombes de Rome*, Vol. IV.

<sup>14</sup> *Storia dell' arte cristiana*.

<sup>13</sup> *Les catacombes de Rome*, plates facing pp. 213, 222, 226, 235.

church and the Greek church have essentially the same likeness of Christ in their art, the only distinguishing difference being that the likeness preserved in the Greek church has always a slight forelock falling down on the forehead from the central part-

ing of the long hair. All the Christian mosaics in Rome, and many of the later frescoes, were made by artists from Constantinople, trained under the influence of the Greek church. When these artists arrived in Rome they found there a likeness of Christ already accepted as genuine, and they were not allowed to deviate from it by the addition of a forelock. But when Greek artists worked at home, or when they worked in Rome without constraint, they represented Christ with the forelock. But now, when we compare together the Christ of the Latin church without the forelock and the Christ of the Greek church with the forelock, we perceive that they are one and the same Christ, the two being distinguished from each other only by this slight difference. Thus we get the testimony of both the Latin and Greek

FIG. 12

churches to the one likeness. Sir Wyke gives us an example of each style, and places the two beside each other, that we may understand clearly the essential identity and the unessential difference (Figs. 12 and 13). It will be observed that in this argument he does not depend on the early dating of these examples; he assumes that the existence of the same likeness in the apostolic age has been sufficiently proved elsewhere; and his purpose here is to show that it comes to us both from the West and the East, that the entire Christian world agrees in reference to it, and hence that we may accept it as certainly valid. But —

1. I have shown that all the pictures attributed to the apostolic age are late.
2. I have shown that they do not, in any single instance, present the type of features which we find in the mosaics of the fifth century.
3. These mosaics were executed in Rome, and by Byzantine artists. But, if they



FIG. 13

give us a new type, as I have shown, then the Byzantine artists who executed them did not work under the constraint of an ideal already established, from which they were forbidden to depart. They did depart from the earlier representations and gave to the world a new type, an ideal of their own.

4. It now remains for me to say that the forelock is not a characteristic of the Byzantine Christ; that it seldom occurs in eastern Christian art; that when it occurs there it is given to other persons as well as to Christ, and hence is a local and temporary fashion applicable to men in general, and not the result of a tradition concerning the manner in which Christ wore his hair; and, finally, that it is found in western art as frequently as in eastern.

That the forelock seldom occurs in eastern Christian art is apparent at once when we look for it among the mosaics of Ravenna, where everything is Byzantine, and where the Greek artists worked not only free from the constraint of Latin ideals, but under the constraint of ideals which prevailed at Constantinople, their home. In these mosaics Christ appears in scores of instances, but never with the forelock. He is depicted in various ways, with long hair and with short hair, with a beard and with a smooth face, as in mid-life and as in youth; but never with the forelock. This feature is almost the only one, amidst the great variety, which never occurred to the Byzantine artists of Ravenna. Still further: We have many coins of the Byzantine empire, running from 395 to 1453. They have been studied and copied by Sabatier,<sup>15</sup> and the reader can easily examine them for himself. Christ is represented on these coins in scores of instances, beginning early and continuing to the very end of the series; for the emperors thought it well to associate their own images, on one side of the coin, with the image of Christ, the King of kings, on the other; yet in no case has he the forelock, though he has long hair or short, and a beard or a smooth face, almost indifferently. Once more: The great mosaic figure of Christ in Sta. Sophia, at Constantinople, has been uncovered and copied, and it has not the forelock. Yet again: In his monumental work on the history of Christian art,<sup>16</sup> Garrucci has given us engravings of all the representations of Christ made in both the East and the West during the first eight hundred years of our era, but he has not found a single example of the forelock in eastern art.

The enormous mass of material to which I have now appealed shows us that the artists of the eastern church, during at least the first five centuries, had no fixed likeness of Christ to which they adhered; and also that during a much longer period they knew nothing of the forelock. When, at length, we get the forelock in eastern art it is given, not only to Christ, but as freely and frequently to John the Baptist and the apostles. Indeed, it is given to Christ and to others in the selfsame picture, showing that it is not regarded as a characteristic of his likeness made known by tradition. And, finally, we get it in the West much earlier than in the East. The first

<sup>15</sup> *Description générale des monnaies byzantines.* The one standard work on the subject.

<sup>16</sup> *Storia dell' arte cristiana.*

example of it known to me is carved on the end of a marble sarcophagus now in the Christian Museum of the Lateran (Fig. 14). It is probably from the fifth century. No one takes it to be of Byzantine origin, for, while the best workers in mosaic were brought from Constantinople, sculptors were still educated at Rome in the poor art which existed there.

V. In the chapter entitled "A Cloud of Witnesses" Sir Wyke Bayliss searches for collateral evidences in support of his argument from the frescoes of the catacombs. Here he presents seven additional engravings, all of them supposed to contain the likeness enshrined in the mosaics of the fifth century, with which he began his investigation, and which therefore must be used as a standard of comparison at every subsequent step.

Only two of these seven, however, concern us, for five are legendary portraits, of no possible bearing on the discussion. It may be worth while to glance for a moment at these five, that the reader may determine their value for himself. One is a portrait now in the museum of the Vatican and "attributed to St. Luke." Another is a drawing now in the church of Sta. Prassede and "attributed to St. Peter." Three are napkins connected with the legend of St. Veronica, who, it is said, gave her handkerchief to Christ to wipe the sweat from his brow as he was bearing his cross to Calvary, and received it back impressed with a miraculous portrait of the face which it had assuaged. Sir Wyke does not credit the legends connected with these pictures. He produces them to show that the likeness of Christ found in the mosaics is found also everywhere else. No reader who compares them with the mosaics will detect any special resemblance. The mosaics and

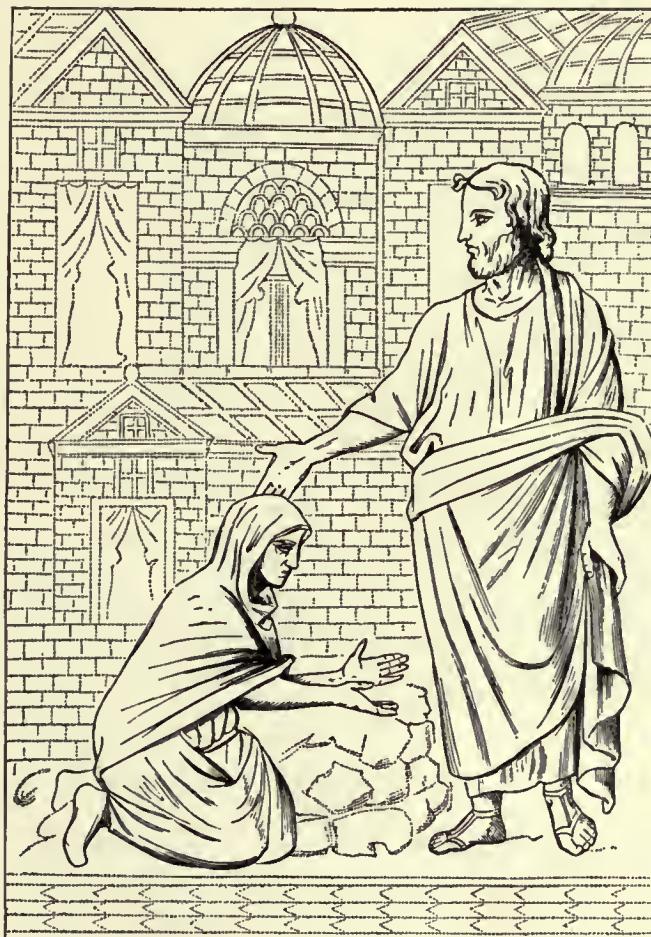


FIG. 14

these legendary portraits are alike in that both groups delineate the human face, but in little else. Yet, if it would give any pleasure to Sir Wyke, let us admit, with all our hearts, the resemblance which he affirms. These legendary portraits are in no sense early;<sup>17</sup> they sprang up in the darkness of the Middle Ages; and they might very well imitate the much earlier mosaics, though in fact they do not. They have no possible value as evidence.

I turn now to the two pictures which at first may seem worthy of more careful consideration. Sir Wyke writes:



FIG. 15

The first of these is of Greek origin, and was discovered beneath the foundations of the basilica of Sta. Maria in Trastevere in the seventeenth century. In construction it resembles a cloisonné enamel; the outlines being of slender ridges of metal, and the interstices filled with a vitreous composition exceedingly beautiful in color.

The same two things which I have said about the frescoes and glass fragments from the catacombs must be repeated here. The picture (Fig. 15) does not resemble the mosaics, and it is not early. As to the first point, it is evident at a glance, and far more evident after prolonged consideration, that the regal mosaics are as different from this poor, thin, and characterless being as was the lordly land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey,

from the desert of the wanderings. But, were it a member of the same family group with them, it could give no testimony, for it has the nimbus in which the cross is inclosed; and, as we have already seen, this is never found in art before the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>18</sup>

The second (Fig. 16) of these two pictures is a profile from the catacombs. Here again only a truly creative imagination can discover any special resemblance to the mosaics of the fifth century, the standard of comparison. In the thin hair, the thin and stringy beard, the thin moustache cut away from the lip, and the thin face and brow, we see the exact antithesis of the King of kings and Lord of lords delineated in them. The face is that of a man, but the expression is that of a sheep. Nor is this picture early. Sir Wyke calls it a mosaic, but it is a painting in imitation of mosaic, and it cannot have been executed before mosaic became sufficiently popular in Rome to lead

<sup>17</sup> They are discussed fully by DÖRSCHÜTZ in his "Christusbilder," Vol. III of the *Texte und Untersuchungen*, New Series.

<sup>18</sup> NORTHCOTE AND BROWNLOW, Vol. II, p. 189.

to such imitations in painting. Now there is some mosaic in the catacombs, but it is so infrequent and so crude as scarcely to merit notice from the great writers who have studied them most carefully; and it is all late. The Christians made little or no use of the mosaic art before Constantine endowed the church with the riches of the empire, for it is a costly luxury. Lowrie<sup>19</sup> copies a portrait-mosaic of the first half of the fourth century as the earliest of its kind discovered in the catacombs, and says that "earlier mosaics, employed for simple decorative patterns, are found" there. The portrait-mosaic copied by him is rude, showing that it belongs to the beginning of the art. The mosaic which this picture imitates was far finer in structure, and hence of a later period. It does not strengthen the argument in any way, for it is of a type alien from the great mosaics of the fifth century, and is itself as late as the fourth.

I have now done with the argument of Sir Wyke Bayliss. I have not proved that the likeness of Christ does not exist. Nor have I proved that it can never be recovered and identified. I have only proved that the testimony of early Christian art, in so far as we have as yet been able to secure it, agrees with that of early Christian literature in answering our question in the negative.

<sup>19</sup> *Monuments of the Early Church*, pp. 292 ff.



FIG. 16

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